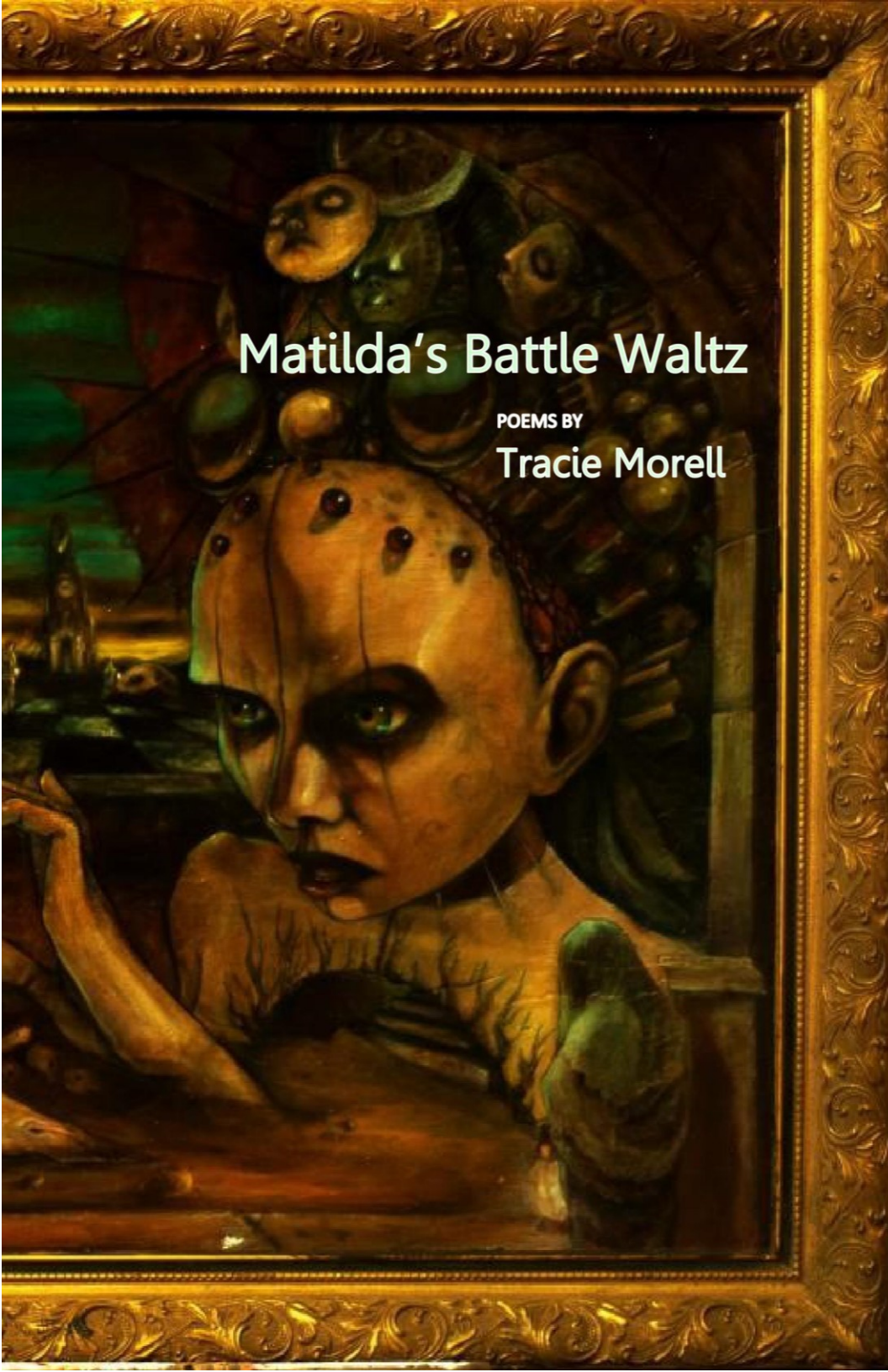


The painting is a complex, surreal work. The central figure is a woman's face, rendered with a pale, almost white skin tone. She has large, intense green eyes. Her forehead is covered with several small, dark, circular marks that resemble eyes or pores. Her expression is one of intense focus or perhaps distress. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, garment. The background is dark and filled with various elements: several floating, pale faces with different expressions, some of which appear to be melting or dissolving. There are also green, organic-looking shapes and what looks like a small, dark, skeletal figure on the left side. The overall color palette is dominated by dark greens, browns, and the pale tones of the faces. The entire painting is enclosed within a thick, ornate gold frame with intricate scrollwork and floral patterns.

Matilda's Battle Waltz

POEMS BY

Tracie Morell

Matilda's Battle Waltz

Poems

Tracie Morell

Matilda's Battle Waltz

2021 free e-book edition

Poems

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for George Looney

They told you in poems and stories
you did not read, or stopped reading
as your cheeks scorched with inexplicable fever,
and because they spoke with a clarity that burned your face,
because they saw with the vision of a telescope
revolving around the earth, they spent years wandering
through jails and bars, exiled to roads after midnight
where gas stations snap their lights off one by one,
seers unseen at the coffee shop waiting for bacon and eggs,
calling at 3 AM to say *I can't stop writing and you have to hear this.*

—Martín Espada, from “Blues for the Soldiers Who Told You”

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Preface

Sometimes, the ugliest things in our world are what need to be addressed the most, and when pontificating on ugliness often a profound beauty emerges from where it seems nothing positive could exist. I've spent much time and energy living, researching, and surviving some of the ugliest things this world offers. These poems weren't easy to write. It's the process that gives them and me life worth living. Beauty finds its way between the space of breathing, and you know you are here. In the moment. Breathing. Art is the only way to capture beauty in all of the ugliness of our world.

To help you digest my work there are some things I'd like you to know. The folk song "Waltzing Matilda" is the unofficial national anthem of Australia and is also slang for wandering by foot with one's worldly possessions in a Matilda, a bag, slung over one's shoulder. The song has a number of variations normally ending with the suicide of a swagman—a low-class transient worker. The following pieces explore a Matilda as if it were a woman in the bowels of poverty and despair. The name Matilda means "Strength in Battle." The great Tom Waits did a version of "Waltzing Matilda" which was the initial inspiration for this collection. In these poems, I use character and persona to examine the seedy underbelly of our culture. Come a-Waltzing Matilda with me.

Indeed, many of the poems in this collection are based on real life experiences and encounters. Writing this collection was brutal emotionally and physically. My hope for writing such pieces is that there will come to be a greater understanding that we are all human, and we all suffer, so we should learn to cherish each other as if we are precious gifts to the world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the following presses and periodicals in which some of the poems from this collection first appeared. These publications encourage writers to push the envelope to aspire for bigger and better things. I would like to thank you for your belief in my work.

Lady-Lazarus Press for printing “Lot’s Camp Bar and Grill” in their anthology, *poetry with a dash of salt... & a smattering of guest poets*.

blue & yellow dog— “Circumnavigation,” “Waltzing in Tides of Salt.”

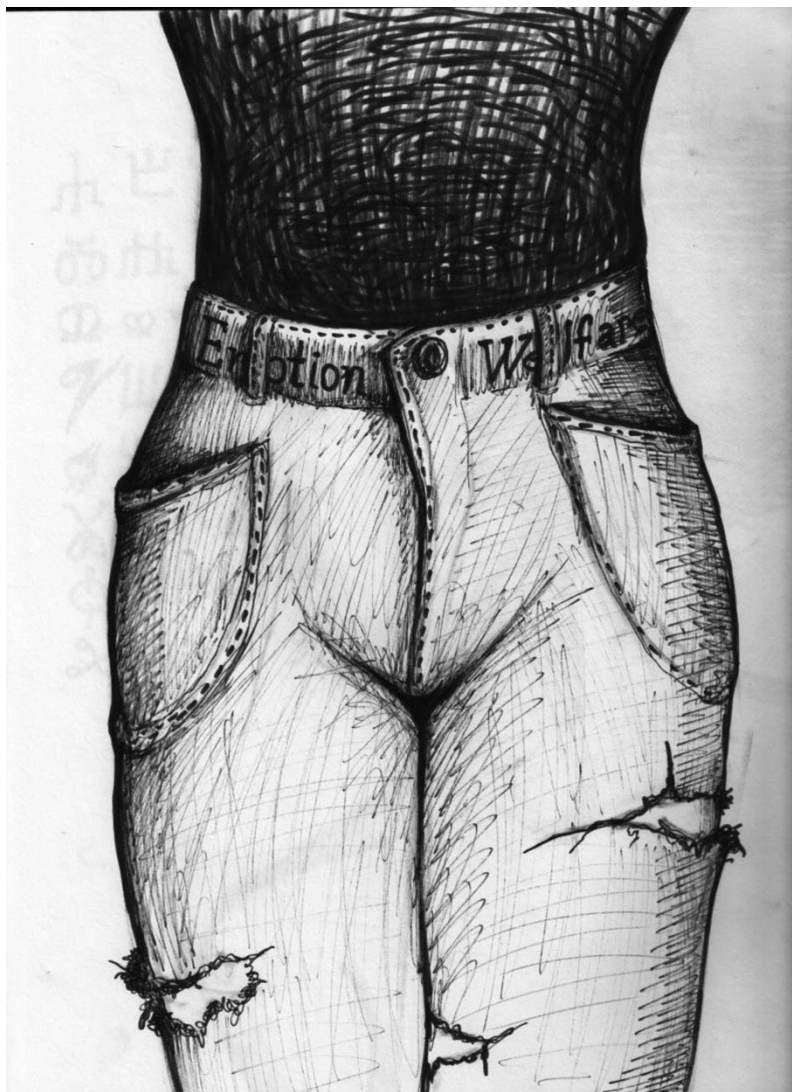
Inclement — “The Fine Line of Beautiful Living,” and an early draft of “Matilda’s Distractions” under the title “One Can Engage Like Moments: Confession of Mental Health.”

Along with the various publications which took particular interest in my poetry, I need to thank my family for keeping me going. They are an endless well of support and love. My loving husband has been a pillar of support for me. I am particularly thankful to John Burroughs for believing in the vision I had for this collection. The poems in this collection are an unflinching look at the grotesque nature of our contemporary culture, and how it can become an infection inside any one of us. So, you can imagine that I was relatively surprised at anyone’s excitement in regard to these poems. Thank you John for taking a chance on this timid poet’s scary-ass poems that make people uncomfortable (I know they made me uncomfortable until I unleashed them).

I am so blessed to live in a community where there are so many talented artists and writers. To have the opportunity to work so closely with Kris Risto on the illustrations of these poems transformed my relationship with my own work in such a positive and powerful way that I am eternally grateful for the

amazing gift of art Kris has given me. Ken Johnson and I have known each other for most of our lives. His painting captures exactly what I imagine Matilda's world to be. I need to express my undying gratitude to both of these amazing artists (and friends). Without the two of them, this book could not exist. As I mentioned, I am blessed to have such amazing and talented people in my life, and another person whose help with this collection was indispensable is Rick Lopez. His smarts with pulling artistic works together into a finished product is unmatched, and I need to express my love and gratitude to him for helping this wayward writer in polishing up Matilda. Namaste. Blessings and love to you all.

Matilda's Battle Waltz



The Emotional Welfare State: an Analysis

We long for something we don't even know
we want and don't even know how to identify.

You wait on a platform, where trains used to
stop, jingling the painstakingly earned coins¹

in the pocket of your favorite broken-
in jeans—hand-me-downs from your step-

mother who doesn't want

the \$150 jeans she bought for her real
daughter to go to waste, so she fished them out

of the dumpster they'd been chucked in. Try
knowing that you are sick and only

have three months to fix it, before the Medical
Assistance runs out. If your neighbors knew,

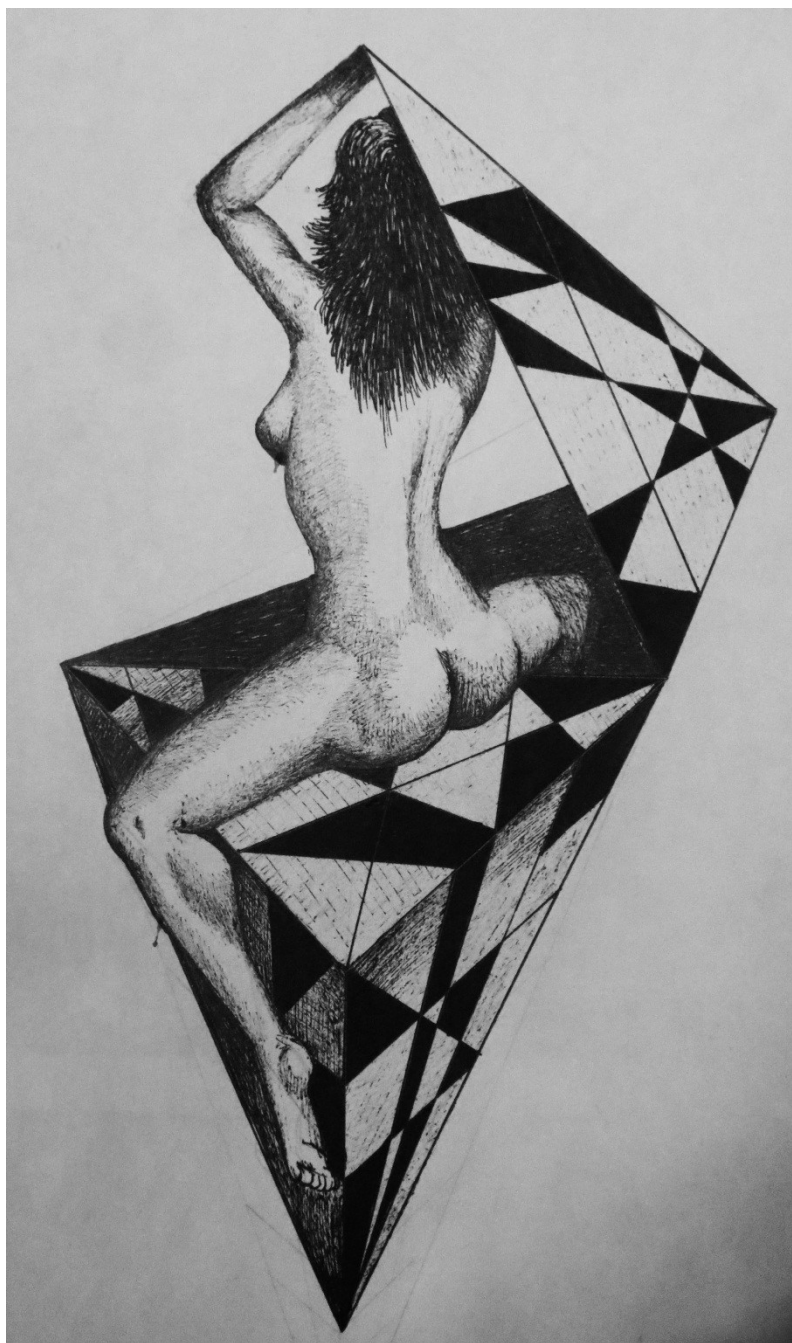
they'd hate you for your impoverished-ness. Your parents
got a new truck, re-sided the house, abandoned

you at 7, and built a new addition
to their house entirely surrounded by commercial

real estate. The information you possess
doesn't let you look away from any

train-wreck night, no matter how terrifying.

¹ with the trepidation of not knowing where to find any more



Liturgia Horarum

She is insignificant. There is little more in this world that is more easily overlooked. Matilda

knows what she is. Her pain is meaningless among the vespers, and her

efforts end up in vain. A rat cowry has more chance at life. Some people are

just born into lots where they're never quite enough for anything. Matilda knows she is no

one. Just another bar joke. A fly that will be inevitably squashed. Despair's an ocean

so vast no ship could ever navigate it. When she is secluded enough for tears, tides come in

buckets, selfish sacrifices of salt made by women such as Matilda. Her

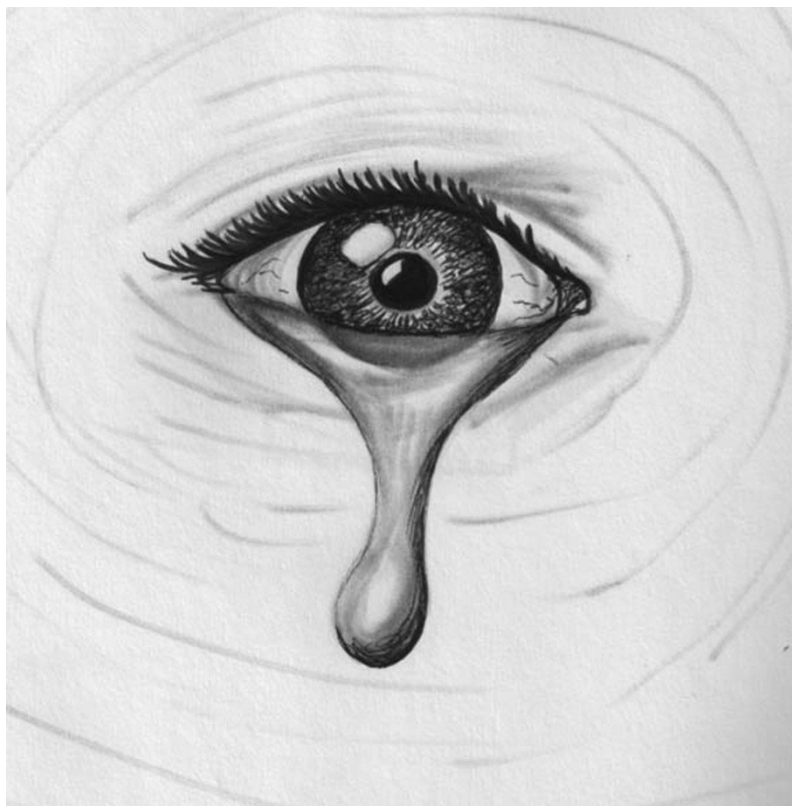
prayers lack imprimatur, so no God is willing to listen. She sees that

there is no chance at *nihil* *obstat*. Not even her

pillow will listen. The same pillow she endowed with so much salt not even the Dead

Sea could contain as much. Rocking herself so gently as if on the bow of a boat

repeating *Ave Maris Stella*, over and over, so maybe she could answer her own novena.



Waltzing in Tides of Salt

Waltzing before dinner is what Matilda dreams of,
being from a disjointed era far removed from
the days when most people waltzed. She never gives

much thought to anything other than where
the next drink will come from, her eyes the mystery
of an unnamable blue which refuses to color

the oceans, leaving them with only the salt
of broken days. She dances to nothing, no music,
& you gaze at her graceful box steps,

thinking her music is the sadness you start to hum.



You Better Fix That Staring Problem

You see her staring right through
your own vision. There

is something about the awkward
skinny woman who has the staring problem:

her eyes seem as lethal as the edge
of a Samurai blade, but she doesn't

understand a thing around her and is just
making it all up as she stares off into space.



Fierce Honesty of the Socially Awkward

Matilda takes her painted bar mask off,
turns the lock on her front door. Unhooks

the “bra-armor” under her shirt and slips the straps
over her arms. The undergarment thuds

to the ground. She wraps
her favorite scarf around her head

the way an African woman once taught her,
relieved to have the scent of the scarf around her

face rather than the various putrid odors she
encounters throughout her long days. Matilda loves

the smell of spices and grapes. This is the time Matilda becomes
herself. This is silent

recap time of the day’s case histories
of abuse. Sparks of ice shatter like tears

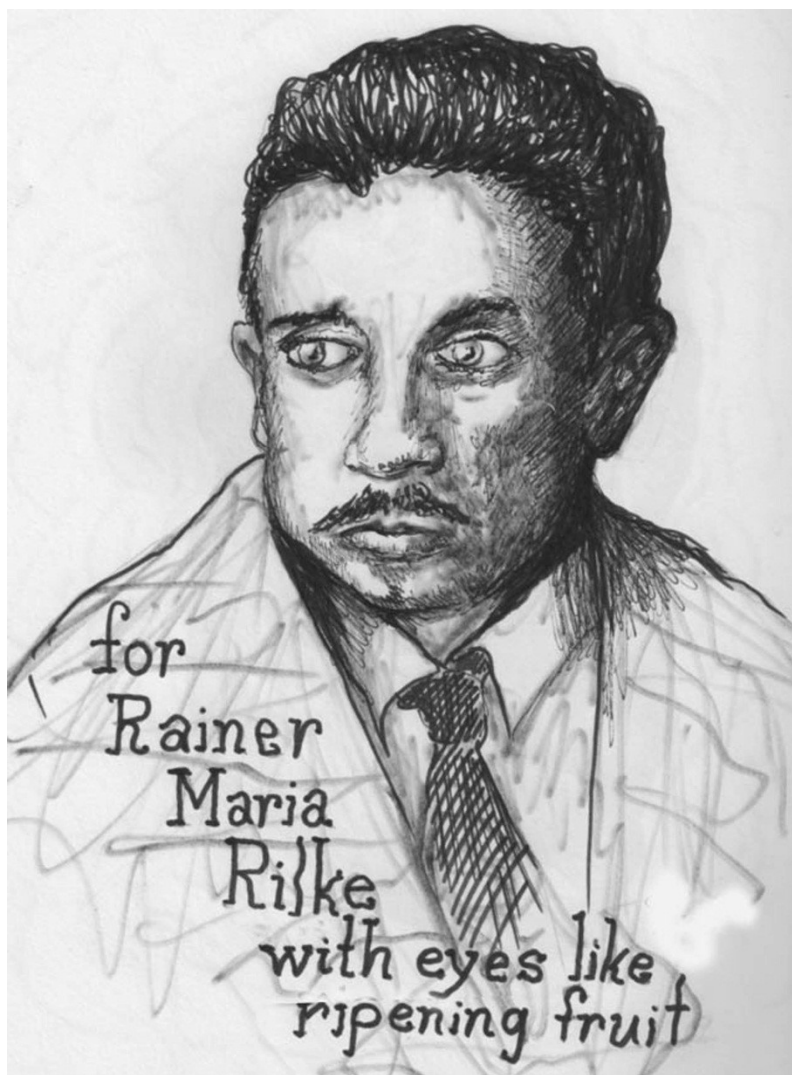
on her hand when she drops
two rocks in her

highball for the Bushmills. Her sofa,
that big hugging pillow of gray which sucks her into

its cracks, patiently waits for Matilda
to curl up like a cat longing for that stroke of

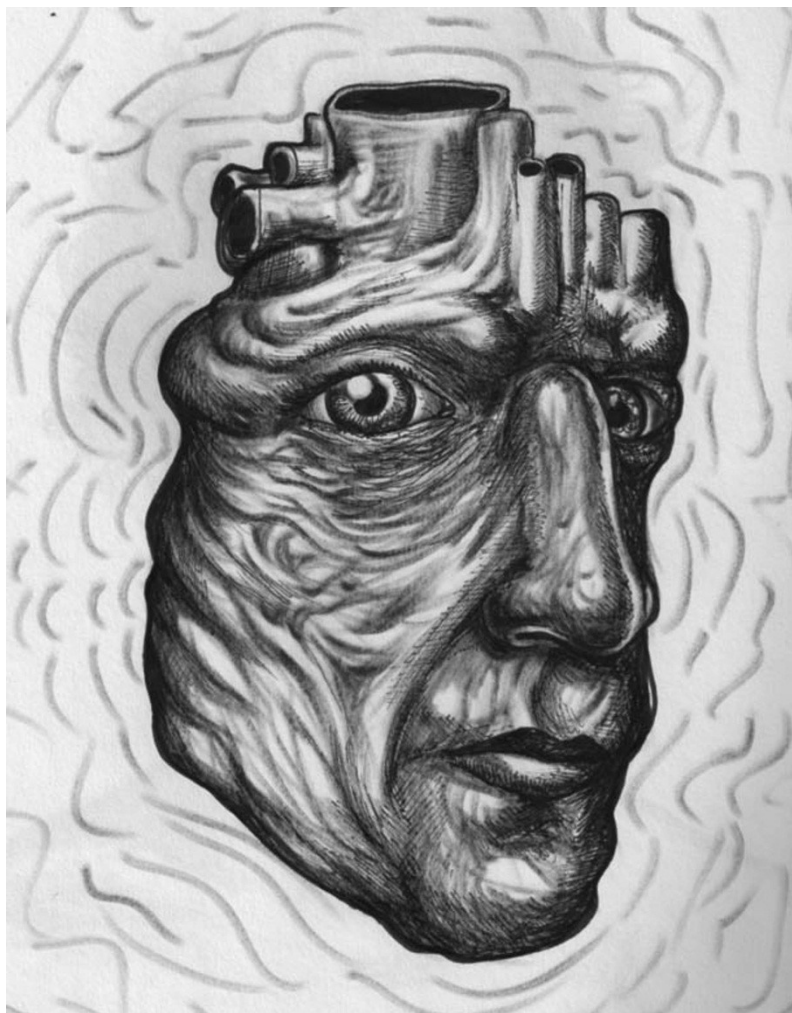
so desired attention. Pen in hand, she begins
to unfold on a tattered, coffee stained notebook

which no one ever sees. She is free,
staring at her aging hands.



Succumbing to the Rose

I have searched, God-
 damn it, Rilke. It is
 always refusing me,
this metaphor. The fucking
 lovers, who make you
 hate the salt
you made, how did you
 consolidate them
 within yourself, or did
it kill you? The sight of
 your dazzling rose
 makes me succumb to
its grace. I cannot rid myself of
 it. I would
 gouge out my eyes,
but the blinding artistry of
 its bloom has
 engraved itself on
my brain. I fear it, the rose,
 my most intimate lover,
 death.



This Is How it Starts

A lean in to hear you, a little
closer than expected. Your whole body

starts to vibrate
in accordance with mine, and it is

the most terrifying experience lips
could ever express.



Matilda Needs a Different Day Job

Right hand on her neck, hoping
the cut is not too close

to her jugular, Matilda remembers
a samara is a flattened fruit

commonly called a 'helicopter' & found
on trees such as the maple

in her front yard. The Puerto Rican
girl—whose razor adorned fingers

are like the ones her mother uses to cut
white powder on a broken mirror— goes calm

as Matilda whispers, *I love you, Samara*. While
holding the little chubby girl, Matilda tries to

contain the oozing from her etched neck.
Possessed by her mounting history

of abuse, the little girl doesn't know
who she is. At times, she doesn't know

what she's doing. Samara
is a city in Russia, & its origin

is Hebrew, in which Samara is
Protected by God. Not this Samara,

who has never been protected
from the father who nearly killed her

& her mother. Matilda lets her go & this cherubic
little girl turns on her, folding chair raised like a fiery sword.



The Death of Matilda's Ignominy

Some lessons are harder
than others as some can sicken
in a forgotten way. Remember
the ring around the rosey. When partaking

in poison, you can't expect any death
but your own. Some truth
wanted etching in Matilda's
impermanent flesh. It's not

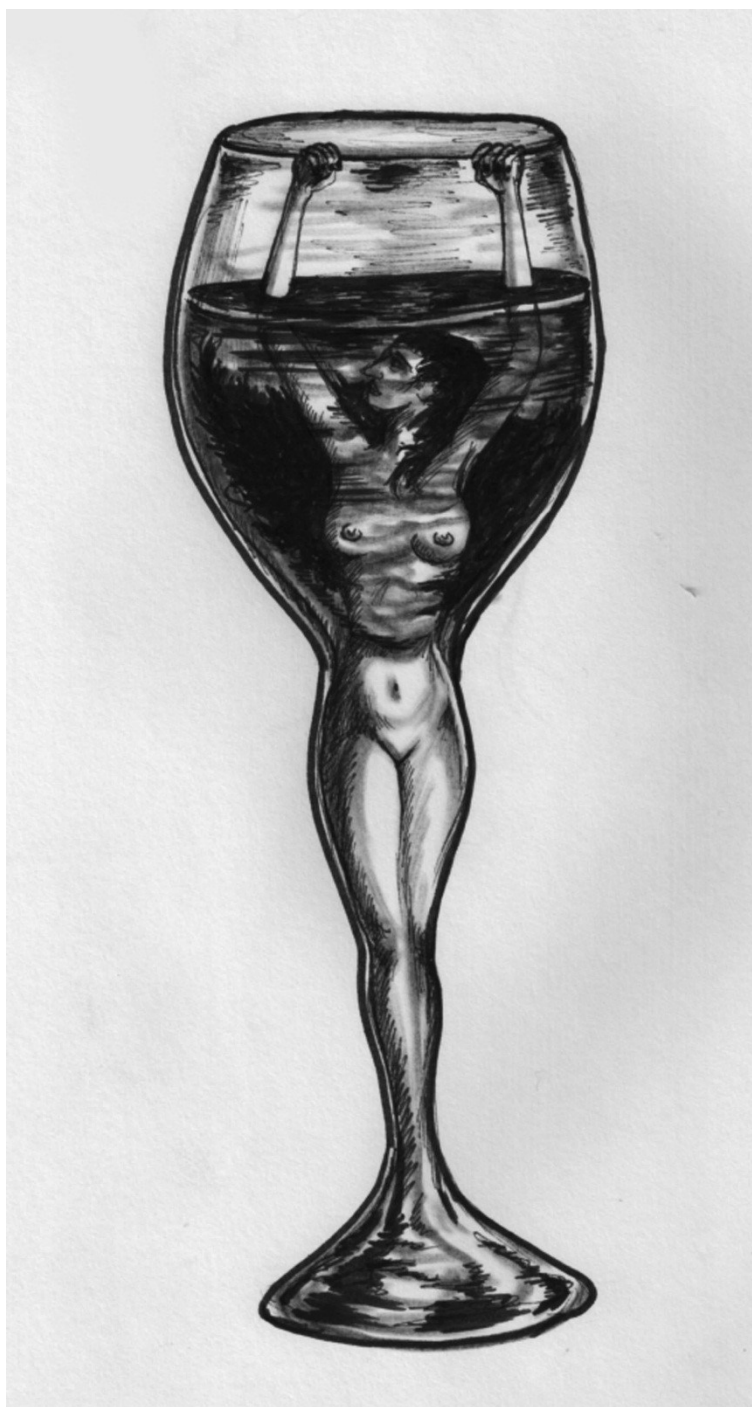
sin, swear to God,
but a cunning impairment
navigating her on a steady path
between birth and the most despicable

death. Being no fool, she sees the fallacious
promises of a bottle, its only intention
the spiral of a godless dervish from Columbia
with Devil's Breath. Matilda has been clever

enough to avoid becoming another zombie
in this world. This time is no different: the body politic
purging the inner scorn of a poisoned
soul in the scraping sound of steel to scroll.

She refuses the blindness caused by ingestion of
septic Blue-ruin. Her spirit no longer permits
the mind to manufacture venom. Since she knows
how terrible angels truly are, she avoids using

Angel Trumpets for floral
arrangements filling empty bottles.



The Fine Line of Beautiful Living

Walk out past the stacks, rows, aisles
of books, where memoirs of battles slowly gave way
to case histories of molestation and abuse.

—Larry Levis

Your grandest gestures remain
unnoticed. You have
a hand which can part oceans,
but cannot save you from the desires

of men. Girl, you are to be useful
in moist ways. They care nothing for
the goings on in that mind of yours.
Don't even try to talk. Unless

to advertise for sex or violence.
There is no God. You are all
that you have, & that body may be able
to find you some bread to break. You can

always obtain wine to drink. You have
the right frame for that. They like you
intoxicated. Under their weight,
you imagine Kafka, become the Hunger

Artist. Hungry to find any meaning
to the needless sufferings you are
so gifted to witness. No man cares about
the story of a girl deflowered at an age too young

to acknowledge. No one wants to know
such things, but there you are:
seedless & hollow. There are
things people do not know they have

until those things are gone. You
did not know you'd be the poetry
of a boiler room romance with a man too old
to be your father, & you too young

to know what you possessed. Too young
to do anything but bear witness to your own ruin.



Matilda's Distractions

Nothing keeps Matilda distracted for long,
though she's constantly seeking distraction. Working

a job that puts her in corporeal danger,
she learns things about how the poorest of the poor

live, & they ain't pretty. She loves
the children she works with, despite them

throwing garbage cans at her, kicking, & biting
her. They are the offspring of Cruelty

& Despair. She cannot change what is
around her but looks, in the ugliness,

for beauty. There is always beauty. She puts herself in
danger so as to look the beast in the eyes

& say *It's okay. I'll always love you.*
Some people, they just don't understand love.



Matilda's Imaginary Russian

Matilda's eyes dart away
when the Russian sailor wearing
some hombre's feather-

adorned hat asks her about her
inflicted heart. *It's funny,*

she says, *I can look
straight into the barrel of a gun
without so much as a flinch, yet*

the sight of you terrifies me. Matilda doesn't fear
poverty, but angels, they're fucking

terrifying. The Russian, who is
the brooding sort, & always
too much the coward to possess

the likes of Matilda, nor is he
worthy to ever be called Captain,

cannot bring himself to utter another
word. It literally makes Matilda
a warrior with a mighty wicked sword

who stays silent on all affairs.



Poeticae Adspectus

The Russian was not the point. The aphrodisiac
rage belonged to a dead German

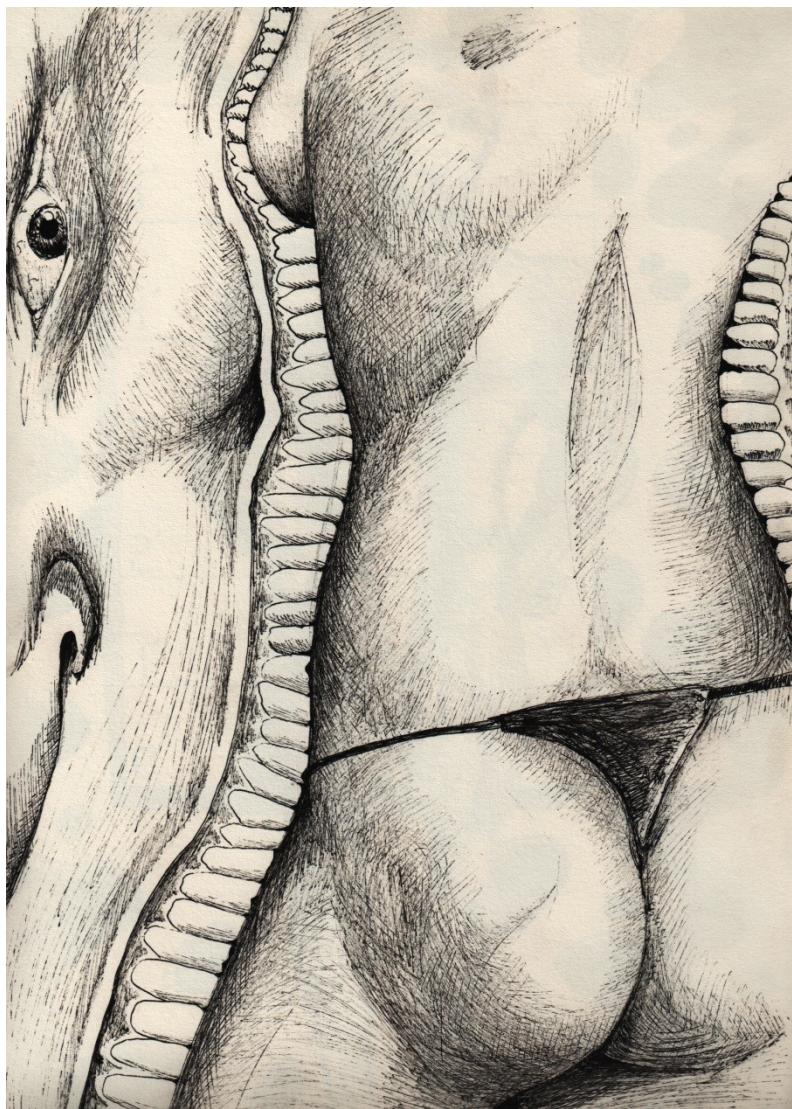
who came to her with bowls of ravishing
roses, the beauty of wilting

and his explanation of how it all was
terrible. There was also a dead Irishman

who remade himself to sing
to her. Being a Polish-Italian who knew

what being alone meant, she wanted to
listen to the brash, bragging of flesh

but she never understood Russian philosophy.



Lot's Camp, Bar & Grill

for Elizabeth & Cat

That's the place to get your spirits on,
& where Matilda makes her money.

It doesn't bother her none cause she doesn't look at it
as work. It's more a necessity. Her work

with the daytime broods doesn't end with the dismissal
bell. Education doesn't pay well,

but she was born with very striking female assets,
so tending bar brought in some cash,

even with the occasional occupational hazard
of rape. She takes care of her graduates,

a liquid soothsayer. The one thing Matilda understands
above all else is the birthplace of vice

& surviving it. She is the strange flesh
of a long gone, virgin daughter. She is

the keeper of salt, in all of its various forms.
Her mother, she heard, had been a pillar

to the community of salt keepers. Matilda is
no different than every distraction seeker in denial,

except she's very aware of the consequences. The forsaken
children in her town, like sod, are cast off as dirt,

not knowing anything but filth, *They're*
just the byproducts of our species, Matilda tells

some Russian sailor sitting at the end of her bar
as she pours him a margarita, the edge of the glass

brimming with an unorthodox-colored salt.



Working for the Societal Throwaway

I have so many flaws, yet they think
I'm a saint. There are only boondocks
and hoods, there ain't no saints
here, only a series of momentary angels.



Imperial Tears of a Good Choklat Stout

Drinking her beer as she wipes down the bar
before she unlocks the door, the long day
of work over. This is only about money.
She drops the rag in the bucket, wipes her hands
on her pants, makes sure her “bar-tending bra”
is on straight. She doesn’t like how she looks

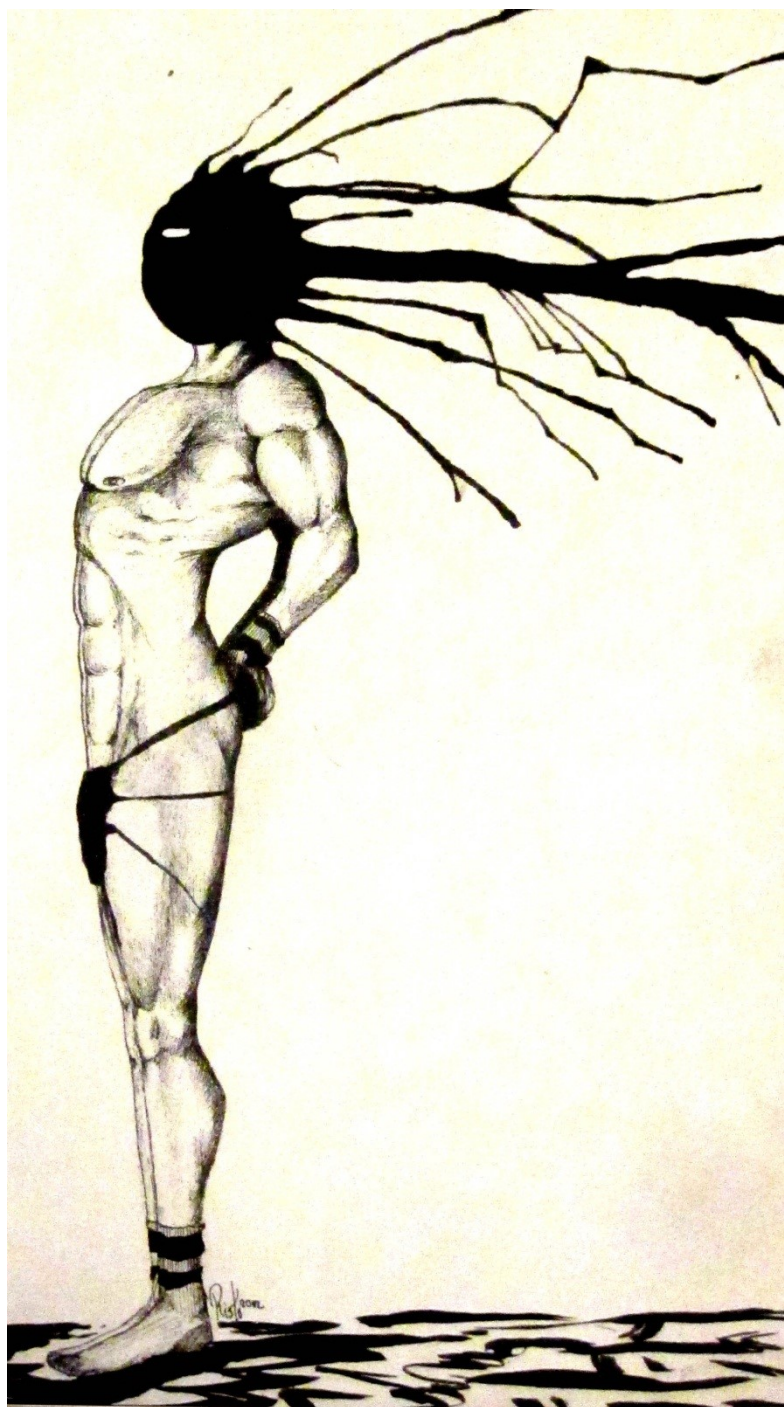
with a bust two cup sizes bigger than she is,
but the bigger the tits, the bigger the tips.
Men are enchanted by silly illusions, & so
fork over bills for a glimpse at a cleavage
created by a massive foam bra. This is her
favorite time of day, the only real peace

she gets. The stale beer & popcorn scent
is more pleasant than the stench that hangs on
the impoverished children. She knows that work
will likely kill her, but she can’t let them go
unloved. The cooler vibrates with a rattling hum.
In this shithole of a life, bravado’s something

you rarely know unless someone admires yours.
Little Chantil told her today she’s a better crier
than Matilda. Flipping on the switch to
the revolving Southern Tier light she laughs.
That little girl has only begun her career
of sorrow. The melancholia gets worse

when you go from victim to whore. Just taken
for granted & abused in fiscal ways now,
Matilda knows better than to hope, but she has
heard that’s what makes life good. The Bible
thumpers say so, & they are real good
at pretending to be happy, dressed up & walking

the forlorn streets, knocking on everyone’s door.



Fear of Men

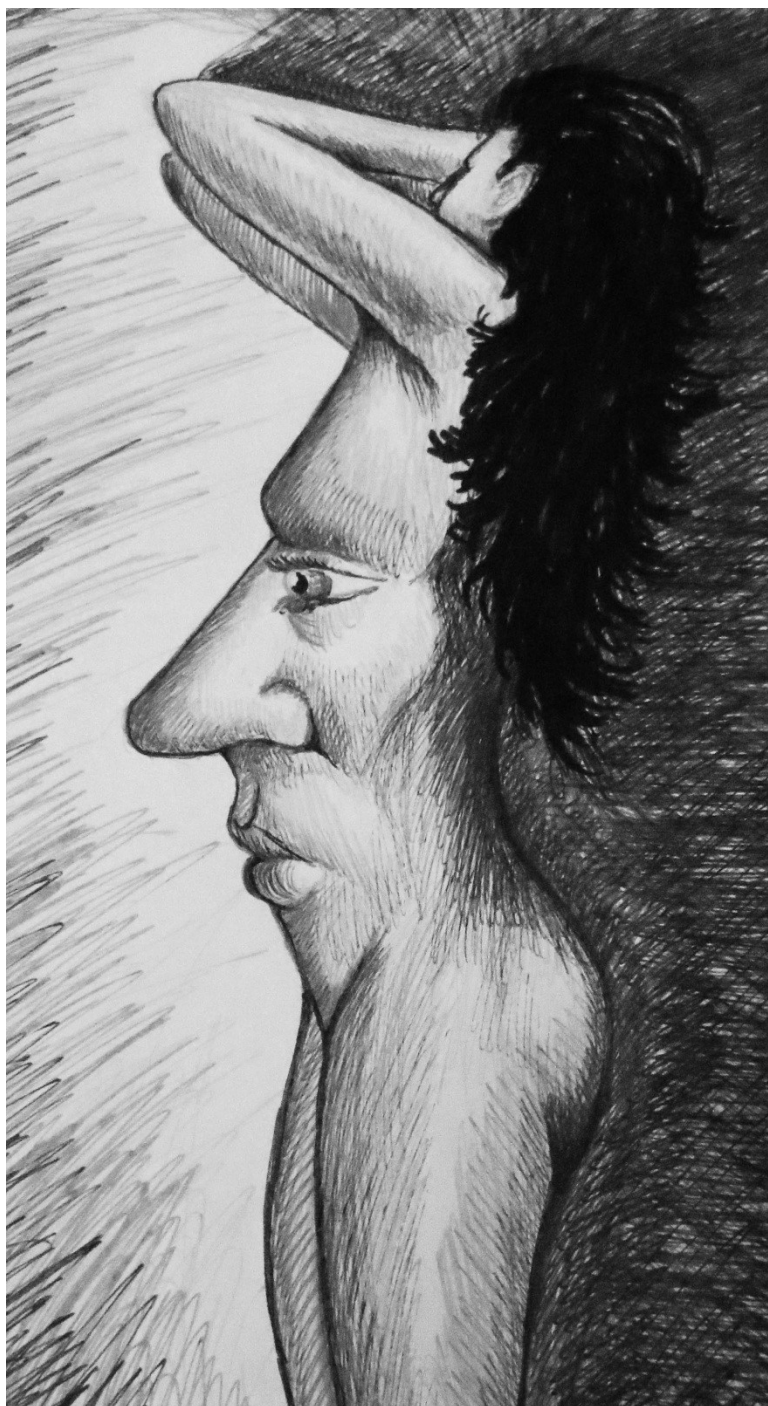
After a long night's work, Matilda
can't speak to much more

than the occasional momentary
angel smelling of whiskey & smoke. She has

a thing for danger. Moreover, she has a thing
for Russian sailors—one of them painted her

head to toe with various tattoo snakes scaling
roses, & a single fluke

anchor meant to remind her
not to forget to seize the moment.

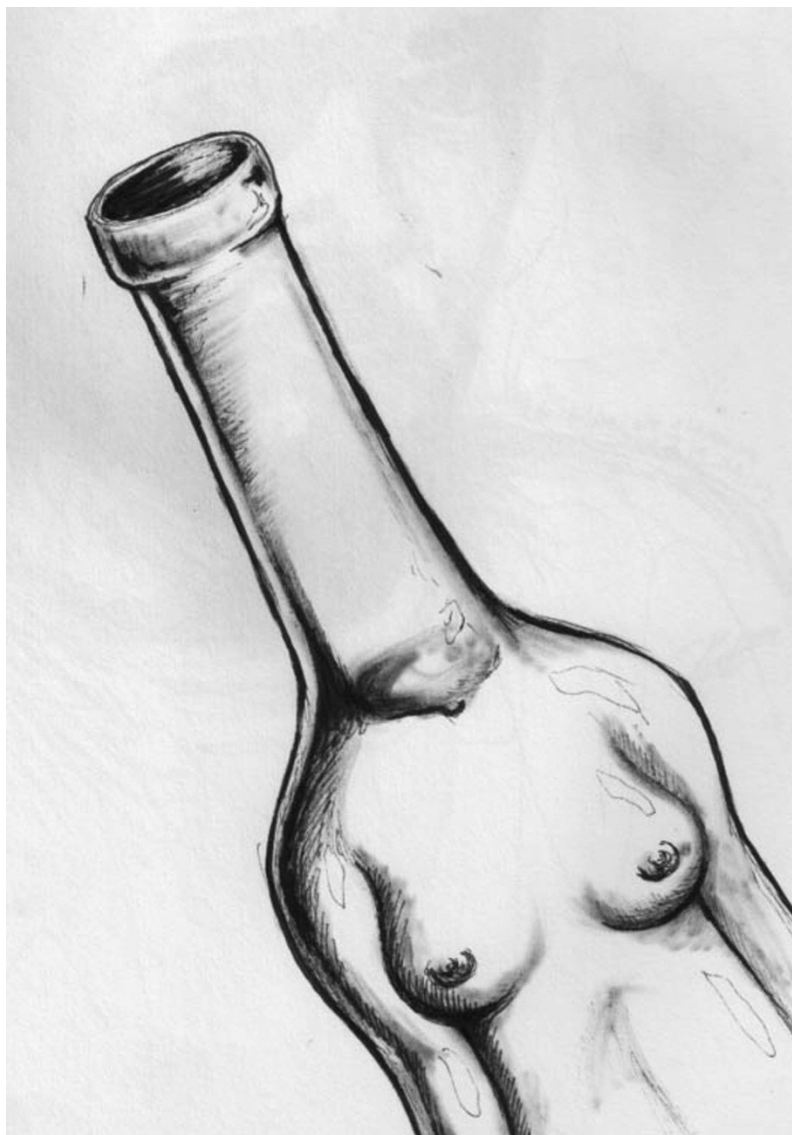


The Wretchedness of Landscape

I got myself in deep because I let him
be a part of my landscape. I know he loves
me, but he is so wrapped up in

this life he's built that only seems
to kick his teeth in. He denies himself
something, while lying back in luxuries

that he couldn't care less about. I understand him
totally. I understand fucking nothing at all.



Washing Bottles on a Slow-Night *for JR & GL*

*What sort of bottle would you suppose
a Russian sailor uses
to taste a woman?* Matilda

muses to some almost dead
Irish bloke—too in love
with his imagination

to ever swallow anything but the lump
in his throat—hunched over her
bar. He shakes his head

& tells her any man
who would rather swallow
a dream honoring her

than press his face on her flesh
to breathe every solid inch of her
is a Goddamned fool. Matilda

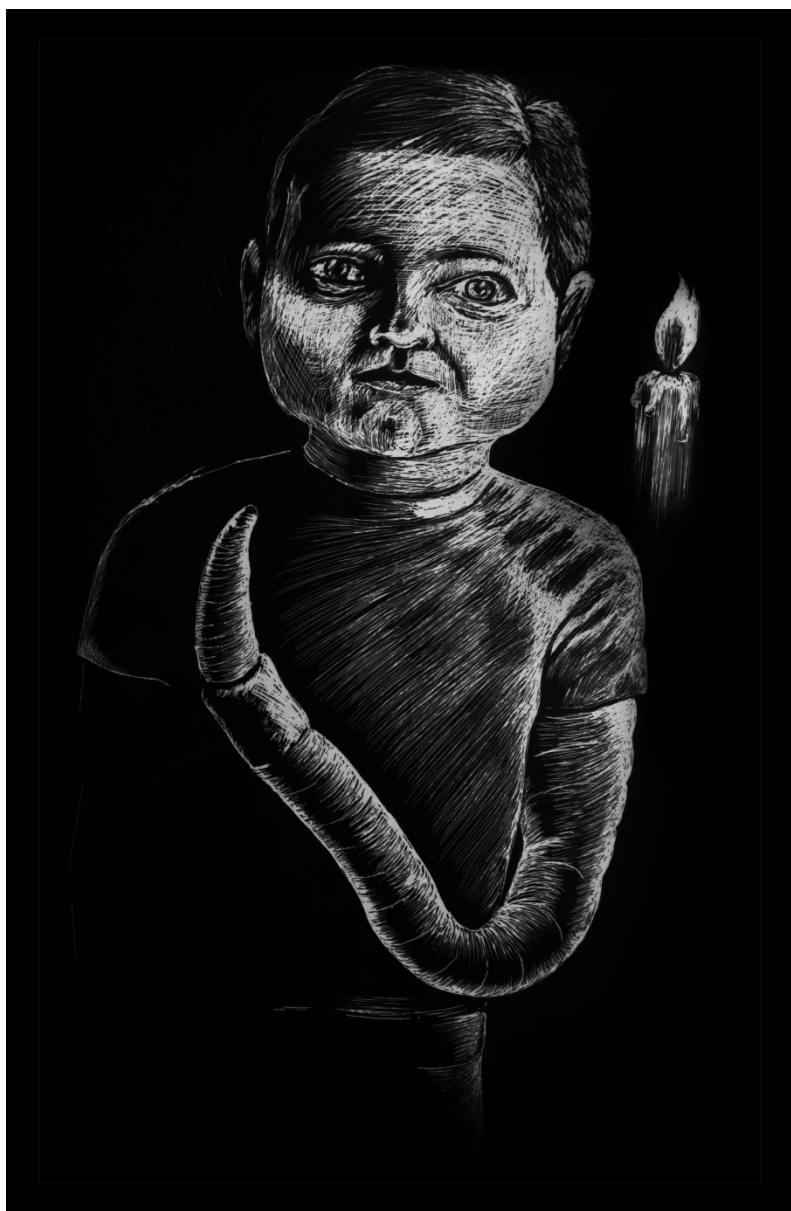
snickers because she knows the Irishman
has no idea what bottles mean to
her. There is a reason

ships in bottles are so precious
the bottles must be corked. Every
open bottle means some sort of defamation,

whether real or illusion. Besides,
if there's nothing covering the bottles,
bugs will get in & begin

to multiply, destroying every bottle
from the inside. Matilda shakes a bottle
half-full of fruit flies. Sighs,

It's a fucking 12 year single malt. The Irishman
declares, *Now that's a sin.*



Judgment Under the Nickel: Matilda Is Suspicious of Universal Truth

Maybe you all stay so fucking stupid
because you know

once you learn shit
it cannot be undone. You cannot not see

the five year-old boy crying, pleading: *Plll-e-
e-e-lease, let me stay here. I love you, Miss*

Matilda. I don't wanna go home.
Choking back your own

bleeding heart, you put him on
the bus because

school is over & everyone has
to go. Five bloody welts

along his neck the following
day. His entire collar red. Just

last week, you caught him touching
a little girl, putting a pencil in her

vagina. Could be you don't know
what the fuck to do with that.



Without a Woman or a Girl

She is sure about excitement. Having lived
numb for so long, Matilda gravitates to

things which entice her with moments
of an expansiveness no God could

conceive. Not able to stop
the monotony of poverty & prostituting

her body for various labors,
Matilda has shut herself off

from her corpus of abuse. She can only really
feel the extremes of terror

or pleasure. Mostly, it's a simultaneous
reaction hard to come by, so she does

it safely in the confines of her own
head, clinging to certain memories

as if they were some sort of buoy helping her
tread the water of the local bay called Misery.



Singing to Myself

for Espada

Did you know your poetry makes me
cry? Even right now. You
give me hope that my tears are for something

better. Can you imagine better? I am
melancholy because I cannot see it
with my eyes. Only in my mind can I be

anything better than disposable. I lost
my day job
for the sound of my

whistle. I don't need
to put a number on my body

for the profit from exploiting
abused children. I will not participate in any
corruption but my own

conceptions, as
damning as they
may be. I remember what it was to be

a child raped by an adult.



Confession from the Edge of Serration

It tears into me
sometimes, that ripping

when he first entered me. I don't remember
the sensation anymore, but

I tattoo myself to cover the scars
of mile markers mapping the distance

I have come. Funny
how things work, I

desperately want to forget the look
in that fucking Russian sailor's eyes,

the one who haunts me
with my own pine breathing, & how

something I cannot remember
for the life of me taints my vision.

The Russian sailor never hurt me,
but that filthy Hempen Halter of my tearing

flesh taints every damned thing I see.



Why Matilda Hates Her Name

When she tumbles, no one needs to be
watching. She is a woman of extremes.

It sometimes dumbfounds her how wretched
life can be. There are so many suffering,

most of them such small urchins. *Transference is
how to get through all the shit*, Matilda tells

some pathetic seadog, lapping up three fingers
of Kraken, too much of a lush to help her

or himself. The worst feeling is
helplessness. *Only names define us*.

How does one explain the world
as most know it no longer includes

hope? *Slow down*, she warns
the sailor. Listen to the moment. Learn there

is no confession long enough to forgive
these sins reduced to nothing

more than symbols. Live by the meaning
of your name as defined by that which is

eye catching. *For fuck's sake, learn
the meaning of names*. She can't name

the Russian sailor. His glass empty, he
stands, leans over the bar, & kisses Matilda

with oceanic depth. The tally falls from his cap
whirling to the ground like a samara.



Pontification of Should'a Been Lovers

This began back when roads were open & the night was
for the wicked. Over two decades, those roads became

pocked & potholed, the nights wickedly long. They had
no idea there would come to be an urgent need

for the touch of each other's skin. That just seeing
each other sleep would make them wish for a god

to thank. *Don't*, she says. *Just imagine what it's like
to run your hands from my neck down to my wanting to*

please you. Imagine the pulsing scent of skin, how smell
can engulf every inch of a starving body, mine or yours.

Engage every single one of your precious mappings.
Observe every fucking domino as it falls. *C'est la vie.*



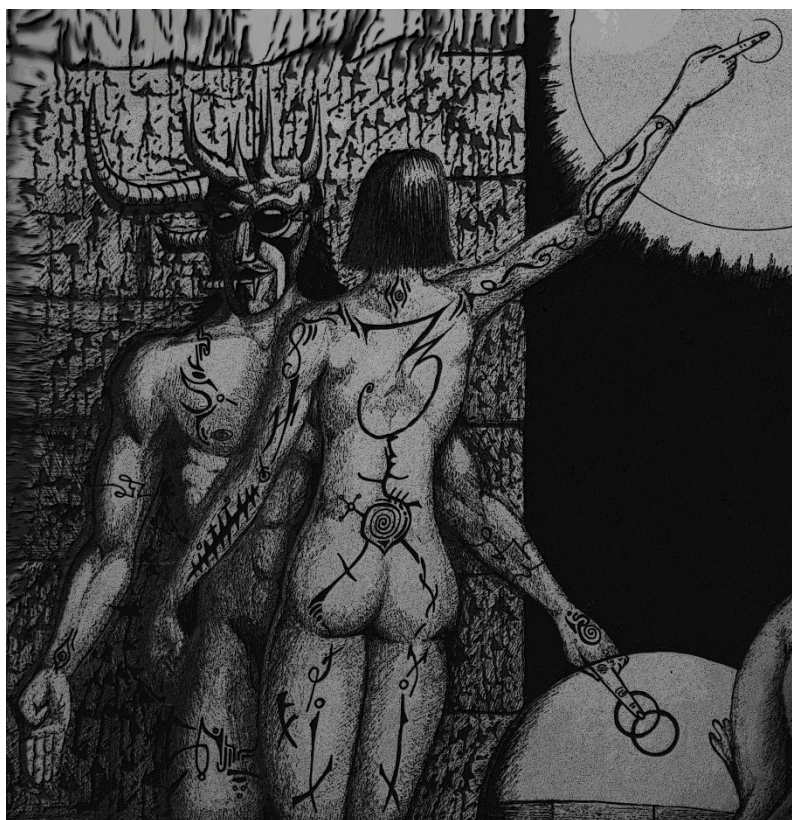
Circumnavigation

It's strange to live where the landscape speaks
for the damned. Even the reflection

that glistens off angelic waves
in the bay known locally as Misery

says everything will decay
& float, stilled & stagnant,

in the murk of Graveyard Pond.
Living is another urban legend.



Matilda Only Does That on Tuesdays

Temptation is a hard thing
to resist, so Matilda gives in

to religion on Tuesdays. That's the day
she's most weak. The weekends

are still bruises by then, having had
but one day to recover. The toll

is the cost of a life, or your soul, depending on
who you talk to. There was a religious man

she entertained after the bar closed
one Tuesday night. He gave her

fleets of sails & a rocking boat so gentle
she could only say, *Oh my God*.

She learned the unorthodox religion of
the inarticulate Russian sailor

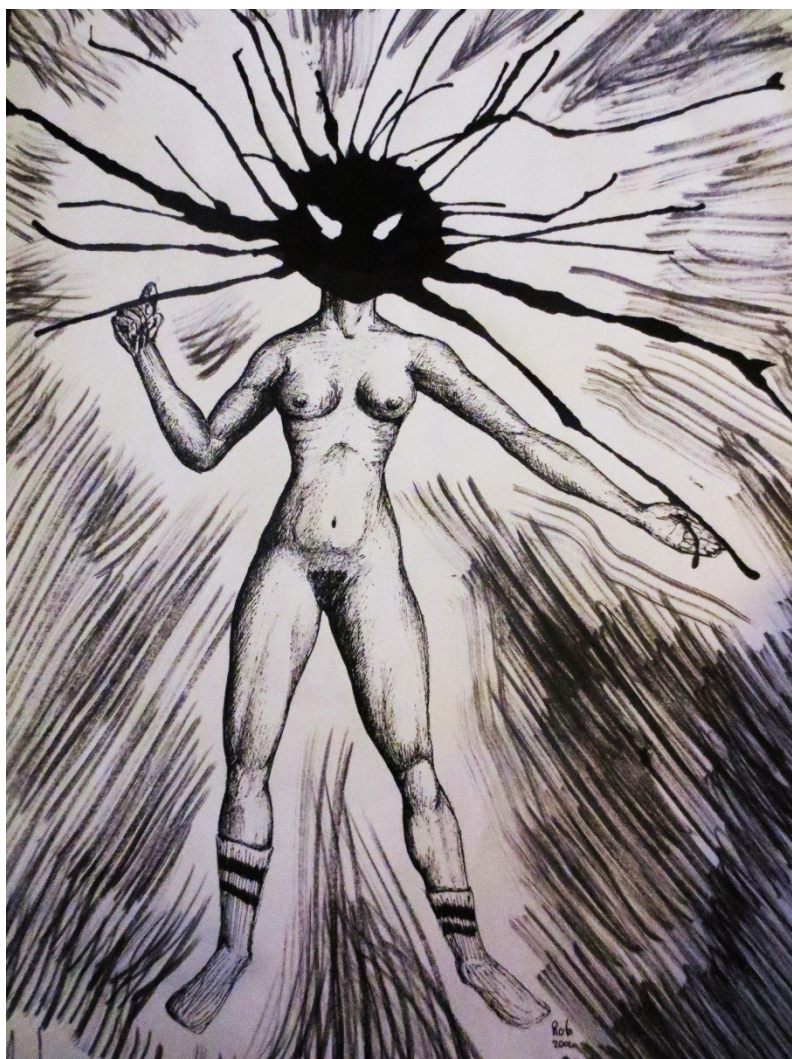
who could speak in colors. Matilda didn't
understand his language; his touches,

though, were like mythic angel kisses, & histories
of gazes revealing all meaning. Eyes say

what only eyes can know. The moments
it's hard to look away are engaging

because there is so much in the world you can't bear
to see. Matilda is sure she looked away,

but every Tuesday night since
she gives in & fantasizes she didn't.



The Tangerine Tangent of an Angel's Far Away Eyes

Matilda knows she ain't nothing but
a well-seasoned stain on
some sailor's sweat-soaked sheets. All of them

loved her, despite every last one of her
flaws. After all, Matilda is

an excellent teacher, & cherishes every one
of her pupils as if they were her
own. Her mentors are nothing short of

worshiped, even the ones not worth it,
& written about as any good

prophet. It's her slow despair of roses
pressed, long dead, between
the pages of the King James in a nightstand table

she's learned. Her body is a commodity so easily
traded. She's learned the nails

with every velvet inch of her pounded,
pleading body. Matilda knows the world
she lives in is just research on feudal living,

& she's just some starving peasant
studying herself dying, a skilled thief.



The Cowardly Drunken Whordeal

Matilda knows it's simple survival. She pours herself
onto paper as if she were a single malt scotch

for that pretentious muthafucka wearing a fedora
at the end of her bar. She's not worried.

Every liquor has a language she's mastered.
Matilda will never drink gin again, but

the single malt whiskeys, they speak to
an ancient suffering she can't shake. Knowing

everything's always some sort of translation,
she understands how totally lost meaning truly is.



Erosion Is the Key to an Artful Landscape

Emotional agoraphobia engendered by the treachery
of beauty is how each existed. Matilda was just

a series of lines which could sometimes be read
as poetry. The Russian was

the blending of colors & a lack
that sometimes resembled an abstract

painting. He saw her slender arm
violently etched with assorted flowers

& dead languages, stretched over her shamed,
shaking head, grasping the curb she was

preparing to bite in front of her favorite watering hole.
The Russian Sailor knew Matilda

was a tender myth of flesh. Sewage wafting through
a gentle breeze blanketing her beaten body

stung his nose. He could only bear witness
to this troubled landscape. They had been

well-crafted together, but they could hardly hold
fast. Matilda drowns in an ocean of drink

searching for the corked bottle holding him captive
always bobbing just out of reach. He is punctured

by her degraded days, the razor of her tongue eroded
by the lapping waves of whiskey. Weeping on

her knees: a folded memory of some
should'a, would'a, could'a been. This is

the first she's cried in years. No
one sees her cry. With a quiver,

she says, *I think I've met my match.*

Matilda's Battle Waltz



Ken Paul Johnson, Cover Artist

Visually stunning. Thought-provoking. Beautifully disturbing. Ken Paul Johnson is an Erie-based surrealist painter inspired by dreams, occultism, and the psychological nature of mankind. His work ruminates on the quintessential trepidation of walking into a gorgeous nightmare. Perambulating through the darkness found within us all, he paints stories of despondent beauty; cogent, yet seldom spoken of. His enigmatic paintings encapsulate the undiluted rawness of the human psyche.

Ken is open for commission work and portraiture upon request.

—Marygail Heinrich



Kris Risto, Illustrator

I like to think of myself as being in-between, a hybrid akin to an amphibian, a soul neither good enough for heaven nor evil enough for hell. Never really at home in any environment but rather stuck between two. I was raised by one culture while living in another, always defending one to the other. This gave me a unique understanding of both while feeling complete in neither. That is the deepest influence in my life and my art. Being in-between allows me to see both sides; judge two ways, both agree and disagree at the same time. My art is both serious and ridiculous, as is the world we live in. My art combines religious imagery, current events, science fiction, and images reflecting my Macedonian heritage.

Tracie Morell, Author

Tracie Morell was raised on the savannah by a pack of feral gazelles. At a young age, she learned to bend iron bars with naught but her teeth and sheer determination. During her school years, she consistently wowed her teachers and mentors with her ability to dodge skepticism while performing feats of whimsical magic. In adulthood, she has birthed miniscule acrobats who assist her in her day-to-day tasks of smashing the banality of various poverties. In her spare time, she enjoys semaphore, scrimshaw, collecting rejection letters, and working on cars for the love of artistry and craftsmanship, despite her loathing of vehicular landscapes and the smell of ethanol. She resides in a land beyond your reach. Only Ben Frasier knows how to find her.

Love for Matilda

"Tracie Morell's work exhibits a lyrical acuity which illuminates and devastates. She leads us on a harrowing and electrifying journey through the life of Matilda, a being who dances on the brink of existence between what is marginalized and what has risen above to live in rarified air. Morell has no fear; our eyes blaze and dilate with Matilda, as we bear witness to our collective ruin. Morell's poems celebrate the connections between the interior and exterior world and in doing so, take us closer to both."

—Kelly Boyker, Poetry Editor at *Menacing Hedge*

"Tracie Morell is the patron saint of every woman that is tough, beautiful...and pissed off. The thing I admire about her the most is, she doesn't bitch about life's short comings, she resolves conflict with a love that is bulletproof. *Matilda's Battle* is her recent attempt at reminding the world that if you want to be happy...you better ask questions."

—Danny Klecko, author of *Houdini in St. Paul*

"These are not to be read with eyes — it takes but a few lines before you feel her words writing themselves into you, burning the beauty and the pain on the insides of your eyelids and the long bones of your ribcage. Tracie's poems are scrimshaw and snowflakes: permanent, yet glittering."

—Amanda Gowin, author of *Radium Girls*

"Reading *Matilda's Battle Waltz* is succumbing to a mesmerizing liturgy of literary moves that includes Matilda's pontifications, navigations, poetic landscapes, work woes, and foreign loves. The reader travels the path of a most beautiful way of living that does not deny or distinguish between the glorious and the seedy, but sees each poem as a song, a part of the poetic whole. Indeed, the roots of Matilda's experience grow with you upon every read and you find yourself tapping your foot to her poetic rhythms as the highs and lows pull you into her life's dance."

—Kathleen D. Gallagher, author of *I See Things Are Falling*

